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INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE
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AMCONSUL PESHAWAR

S E C R E T PESHAWAR 000372

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TAGS: PTER MOPS PGOV PINR PK AF
SUBJECT: FATA SECRETARIAT ON BEATING AN INSURGENCY

REF: A) PESHAWAR 370, B) PESHAWAR 205

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REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) National Intelligence Officer (NIO) for South Asia, Peter Lavoy, his team, and Peshawar PO met with senior personnel from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas' (FATA) Secretariat on June 17. The officials believe that security forces in the FATA are unable to confront an "insurgency," and suggested adopting a nimbler, less conventional approach. Tehrik-i-Taliban is a serious threat to FATA officials who are deeply concerned by brutal attacks in recent months. A systematic campaign to eliminate tribal elders has led many tribesmen to avoid siding with a political administration that is perceived to be "weak." FATA Secretariat officials see peace agreements as a tactic not a strategy and predicted that they will inevitably be violated. While there are a few signs of improved coordination at the provincial level, a widening disconnect with Islamabad may sink these efforts. End Summary.

ACS Questions GOP's Capacity to Confront an Insurgency

¶2. (C) Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) Habibullah Khan told NIO Lavoy on June 18 that Pakistanis have made a commitment to confronting militancy as evidenced by the "1,000 people who have been killed on the frontier" during recent years. He questioned, however, whether Pakistani security forces have the capacity to "stop an insurgency." The ACS noted that militants are often better armed, trained and disciplined than the Levies, Khassadars and even Frontier Corps troops stationed on the Pakistan/Afghanistan border. "Even the army," he stated, "is trained to fight only on the plains of Punjab."

¶3. (C) The ACS said that Pakistan's security forces have responded to the terrorist threat in a "conventional manner." He emphasized a need for a deeper focus on counterinsurgency tactics and equipment to better confront a "highly mobile" militant threat. The FATA's security forces need night vision goggles, better training and increased intelligence sharing in order to be able to respond to militant ambushes.

¶4. (S) Habibullah suggested a guarantee from India not to attack Pakistan's eastern flank. Such a guarantee, he said, might help in making the case for redeployment of troops stationed on the Pakistan/India border to the Northwest Frontier.

Tehrik-i-Taliban

¶ 15. (C) Responding to a question posed by NIO Lavoy, the ACS stated that Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) does not have the "strategic support" of people in the FATA. Habibullah said that tribal people are "being held hostage" by militants and if they try to organize against the terrorists, they are killed. The ACS stated that TTP and Baitullah Mehsud are essentially interested in establishing their own "fiefdom." FATA Director of Projects, Fakr-e Alam added that TTP "has become a very serious threat to us." He said that the organization is now threatening the Northwest Frontier Province's (NWFP) settled districts and risks engulfing Pakistan's other provinces if it is not checked.

¶ 16. (C) Alam said that there is no longer any safe ground for GOP officials in Pakistan's northwest. As an example, Alam referenced the February 29 murder of a Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of police and three other officers in the NWFP's Lakki Marwat district (ref. B). A suicide bomber detonated explosives only hours later at a funeral gathering in Swat for the DIG, killing at least 40 people and injuring 70 others. Fakr-e Alam said that the DIG was targeted because he had chosen to confront Tehrik-i-Taliban. "If you choose to fight them," Alam said, "they will track you down, kill you, and then target your family." Alam also noted the impact of TTP on Political Agents.

In the past, PAs had been able to transfer out of a "hot" area to a safer posting. With TTP's growing presence and links across the FATA and the settled areas, the ability to manage/reduce risk has suffered, he said.

Tribesmen Will Follow the Strong

¶ 17. (C) Alam, who has twice served as Political Agent in North Waziristan, criticized the GOP's military response to TTP. "We have tried to swarm them, but this simply provided more targets, not additional security." Alam said that even contractors working for the GOP have been targeted. According to Alam, the GOP has failed to take out local militant leadership with the exception of Nek Mohammad who was killed in an air strike in June 2004. He said that tribal people will support whichever side appears the strongest, and a perception is growing that the government is the "weaker party." Alam believes that additional investment in quick reaction forces would lead to GOP victories and confidence building.

¶ 18. (C) ACS Habibullah echoed Alam's emphasis on the importance of the government appearing "strong" in the tribal areas and stated that the systematic murder of hundreds of tribal elders (maliks) from 2006 to the present has demoralized entire tribes. Habibullah stressed that maliks are much more than just individuals, but instead, represent the local manifestation of the FATA's political administration. "When an elder is killed, it is an attack on a village as well." He said that when maliks see that the government is strong, they will "take the foxes [read: militants] out of their holes" because they know that they will be backed up.

Peace Agreements

¶ 19. (C) ACS Habibullah Khan said that he is in favor of conducting peace talks in the FATA, but noted that such talks needed to be used to buy the GOP time to instigate in-fighting between militant groups, gain the loyalty of FATA-based leaders, and develop a longer term strategy to root out insurgency. Habibullah implied that the GOP was not using the time as effectively as it could. He further added that the agreements will "undoubtedly be broken, as they always are." He echoed NWFP Governor Owais Ghani's theory that peace agreements create space for GOP-sponsored development projects to proceed (ref. A). The key, the ACS said, was for the GOP to move in quickly after an agreement to provide security and deliver services. Qazim Niaz emphasized the need for a clear-cut strategy and goals for what the GOP wanted to achieve in the brief interlude

the peals deals provided.

¶10. (C) The ACS differentiated the current round of peace agreements from previous iterations by highlighting built in enforcement mechanisms. Habibullah mentioned that the GOP had taken religious leaders into confidence during the present round of talks and could therefore use their buy-in as justification for carrying out punitive actions. He doubted though that the GOP was prepared under present circumstances to respond rapidly to violations of peace agreements.

Mohmand

¶11. (C) Qazim Niaz, the FATA Secretary for Coordination and Administration and who served as Mohmand's Political Agent immediately prior to his present post, noted that Mohmand is coping with five different militant groups at once. He said that it is very hard to determine who is doing what in the agency and he indicated that some of the groups are solely criminal in nature. The ACS said that Mohmand's capital city of Ghalanai is particularly vulnerable to militant attacks because it is surrounded by hills on three sides where militants have taken up positions.

Frustration Mounting

¶12. (C) Niaz added that the increase of narcotics revenue coming from Afghanistan has precluded the GOP from matching salaries offered by the militants. Niaz went on to express frustration at the GOP's inability to kill Baitullah Mehsud when so many other militant leaders are killed "because they are using mobile or satellite telephones."

¶13. (C) The ACS and his two colleagues closed the meeting by expressing their own growing frustration over being "ignored" by Islamabad. The ACS said that he is "crying and shouting that militancy is a Pakistani problem; that this is an insurgency." He emphasized that he has been very disappointed by the glacial pace of Islamabad's responses. NIO Lavoy concurred with the ACS's assessment that more cooperation is required and said that we would continue to work with the GOP on a counterinsurgency strategy.

Comment

¶14. (C) Frustration is growing among FATA and NWFP officials. ACS Habibullah's inability to procure quick decisions from Islamabad echoes similar frustration expressed by NWFP Governor Ghani (ref. A). While there are a few signs of improved coordination at the provincial level between NWFP and FATA officials, a deepening disconnect with Islamabad may sink these efforts.

TRACY